

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 167570

JOINT STATE/DEFENSE MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, MILI, TS

SUBJECT: BOURGUIBA, JR. ON TUNISIAN SECURITY NEEDS

1. (C) HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. MET ON 1 JULY WITH DASD JAMES NOYES TO CONVEY HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACUTE CONCERN OVER TUNISIA'S SECURITY AND TO REQUEST INCREASED US SUPPORT FOR THE PROGRAM IT HAS DESIGNED TO MEET PRESENT AND ANTICIPATED THREATS. BOURGUIBA DESCRIBED TUNISIA AS A MODERATE, WESTERN-ORIENTED ENCLAVE IN AN AREA OF RADICALISM AND INSTABILITY. IT IS LIVING PROOF OF THE FAILURE OF SOCIALISM IN NEIGHBORING LIBYA AND ALGERIA AND IS A TARGET FOR EARLY ELIMINATION BY THESE SOVIET-ARMED NATIONS. HE POINTED TO MID-JUNE STATEMENTS BY COLONEL QADHAFI THAT THE PRECEDENT

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OF LEBANON GIVES ANY ARAB COUNTRY THE RIGHT-- EVEN THE

OBLIGATION--TO INTERVENE ANYWHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD IN SUPPORT OF PAN-ARABISM, AND CALLED FOR US HELP TO ESTABLISH THE KIND OF MILITARY DETERRENT THAT WOULD DISCOURAGE LIBYAN AND ALGERIAN ADVENTURISM.

2. (C) BOURGUIBA ASKED WHETHER THE US WOULD HELP A SMALL BUT IMPORTANT COUNTRY--QUOTE THE ONLY BASTION OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN END QUOTE--MAINTAIN ITSELF AGAINST THE QUOTE UNPREDICTABLE, PSYCHOTIC END QUOTE QADHAFI, AND ASKED THAT WE REDOUBLE OUR SUPPORT THROUGH

INVESTMENT, TECHNOLOGY TRANSFERS, AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE. IN THE LATTER CATEGORY BOURGUIBA REFERRED TO TUNISIA'S NEED TO ACQUIRE ARMS COSTING SOME 1-1.2 BILLION DOLLARS OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, THE FIRST YEAR OF WHICH WAS MOST IMPORTANT. SOME OF THE EQUIPMENT, HE SAID, WOULD COME FROM FRANCE--PARTICULARLY ROLAND AIR DEFENSE MISSILES, WHICH TUNISIA CONSIDERS SUPERIOR TO THE US PRODUCED COUNTERPART.

3. (C) COMMENT. WE WERE SURPRISED BY THE SIZE OF THE EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT PROGRAM MENTIONED BY BOURGUIBA, AS WE UNDERSTOOD CURRENT PLANNING FOCUSES ON THE 100-120 MILLION DOLLARS PROGRAM DISCUSSED WITH USLOT IN MAY 1976 AND SUBSEQUENTLY RAISED BY AMBASSADOR HEDDA WITH UNDER SECRETARY HABIB ON JUNE 23 (STATE 157442) SUPPLEMENTED BY MODEST PURCHASES FROM OTHER SOURCES. CAN EMBASSY OR USLOT THROW ANY LIGHT ON THE APPARENT DISPARITY BETWEEN BOURGUIBA, JR.'S STATEMENTS AND OUR PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF GOT PLANS AND CREDIT NEEDS? KISSINGER

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